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RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0319
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0373
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0706
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 1915
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0397
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 000744

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: "COUP D'ETAT" IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AVERTED --
FOR NOW

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 732

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Pro-coup parliamentarians submitted a motion December 4 to amend the internal procedures of the National Assembly. The motion was a clear attempt to force the dismissal of National Assembly President (and fierce coup opponent) Messaoud Ould Boulkheir and four other FNDD anti-coup parliamentarians. To the surprise of many, the Constitutional Council rejected the proposed amendments, derailing -- at least temporarily -- pro-coup parliamentary efforts to carry out a "second coup d'etat," as anti-coup politicians described it. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The proposal: Pro-coup parliamentarians introduced a motion December 4 calling for an amendment to the internal procedures of the National Assembly. Using the language of the junta, the motion called for rule changes in order to "avoid blockages in the regular functioning of the National Assembly." The proposed new rules would make absenteeism a violation punishable by dismissal. Because anti-coup parliamentarians have been boycotting National Assembly sessions, it is clear who the intended targets were -- National Assembly President Boulkheir and four other FNDD parliamentarians. Note: Boulkheir is not currently in Mauritania. For several weeks, he has been on a trip around Africa gathering support in opposition to the coup. Charge is scheduled to meet with Boulkheir after he returns to Nouakchott. End note.

¶3. (SBU) Ahmed Ould Daddah joins the fray: Nominal opposition leader Daddah and his RFD party supported the proposed amendments, drawing the ire of the anti-coup FNDD coalition. The FNDD already had a strained relationship with Daddah due to his meetings with General Aziz, his perceived support for the junta, and his less-than-subtle attempts to position himself as the next president. An element of score-settling by Daddah may also have been at play. There is supposedly a long-running animosity between Daddah and Boulkheir, dating back to the 1992 presidential election and culminating during the presidential election of 2007, when Boulkheir pledged his support to President Abdallahi (as opposed to Daddah) in the second round of voting.

¶4. (SBU) Constitutional Council rejects the proposal: To

the surprise of many, the six-member Constitutional Council rejected the proposed amendment. The Council found fault with several of the changes, arguing that they were unconstitutional. For example, the Council said that the plan to hold votes on a deputy's dismissal by a show of hands (as opposed to a secret ballot) could subject parliamentarians to undue pressure from the Executive branch.

Note: Constitutional Council members are appointed directly by the president (the current members were appointed by President Taya) and serve 9-year terms. Such long terms of office grant the members a certain level of protection from the turbulent political scene. Perhaps just as important, none of the current Constitutional Council members are from the Oulad Bousba tribe (General Aziz and former President Vall), the Smassid tribe (Taya), or the Idawaali tribe (strongly allied with Abdallahi) -- thereby giving them a freer hand to render decisions without fear of tribal repercussions. End note.

¶15. (C) Comment: The High State Council claims that they took power merely to overhaul the institution of the presidency, and leave the legislative and judiciary branches intact. This not-so-subtle offensive by pro-coup parliamentarians to alter parliamentary rules and force the dismissal of anti-coup members directly contradicts such a claim. FNDD members from the Tawassoul party and Mohamed Ould Maouloud from the UFP party branded the attempt a "second coup d'etat" to EmbOffs. While perhaps a bit overstated, the forced dismissal of Boulkheir and other anti-coup parliamentarians would nonetheless signal an escalation by the HSC in its efforts to consolidate power and remove opponents.

¶16. (C) However, given the upcoming (and much hyped by the junta) "National Dialogue on Democracy" on December 27 (Ref A), it seems unlikely now that Boulkheir will be deposed before or during the "dialogue." Such a move would be a public relations debacle for the junta, which is eager to project an image of national unity for the "National Dialogue." Boulkheir is probably safe until the end of the year at least. However, in a December 15 interview with Al Jazeera, pro-coup parliamentarian Sidi Mohamed Ould Mohamed Vall vowed to continue efforts to modify the National Assembly's internal procedures, despite the setback with the Constitutional Council. End comment.

HANKINS